

Message Text

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TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 348 - JUNE 29, 1977

1. ME PEACE. OFFICIAL ISRAELI REACTION TO THE US MIDDLE EAST STATEMENT OF JUNE 27 SEEMS LARGELY TO ,LAY IT IN LOW KEY. THE THEME OF THE ISRAELI RESPONSE IS THAT BEGIN WOULD DISCUSS THE SPECIFICS OF EACH KEY ISSUE DURING HIS US VISIT, AND THUS ANY SPECULATION ABOUT US INTENTIONS IS PREMATURE. IT NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WAS "NO BASIS FOR THE APPARENT ASSUMPTION IN WASHINGTON" THAT ISRAEL HAD EXCLUDED THE POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATING OVER THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, OBSERVING THAT THE ISRAELI CABINET'S GUIDELINES CALL FOR "EVERY ISSUE" TO BE THE SUBJECT OF NEGOTIATIONS.

2. THIS ATTITUDE IS IN KEEPING WITH BEGIN'S EFFORTS TO
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EVINCE A TONE OF MODERATION AND TO DONPLAY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE US AND ISRAEL. BEGIN DOES NOT WANT TO STRAIN US-ISRAELI RELATIONS BEFORE HIS VISIT. HE APPEARS

TO THINK THAT A REASONABLE TONE WILL HELP HIM TO BRING US LEADERS TO ACCEPT HIS POINT OF VIEW. FURTHERMORE, BEGIN, AFTER HIS INITIAL HARDLINE STATEMENTS FOLLOWING

THE ELECTIONS, SEEMS TO BELIEVE THAT A SOFTER APPROACH WOULD STRENGTHEN SUPPORT IN ISRAEL AND THE US FOR HIS POLICIES AND UNDERCUT INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM OF HIS POSITIONS.

3. IN CONTRAST TO THE OFFICIAL ATTITUDE, THE PRESS QUOTED UNNAMED ISRAELI OFFICIALS AS PRIVATELY EXPRESSING CONCERN THAT THE "HARSH TONE" OF THE US STATEMENT INDICATED AN "EROSION" OF US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL. ISRAELI OFFICIALS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY WORRIED THAT A CONFRONTATION WITH THE US OVER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES IS LOOMING. THE JUXTAPOSITION OF BEGIN'S HARDLINE STANCE AND US DETERMINATION TO MOVE FORWARD HAS HEIGHTENED THIS CONCERN. MOREOVER, AL-HAMISHMAR QUOTED SENIOR SOURCES AS SAYING THAT SUCH STATEMENTS ONLY SERVE TO "AROUSE EXAGGERATED EXPECTATIONS ON THE ARAB SIDE" WITH THE LIKELY RESULT THAT THE ARABS WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO PURSUE A MAXIMALISTLINE.

4. ISRAELI EDITORIALS PICKED UP THIS THEME, NOTING THAT THE US STATEMENT HAD COME PRIOR TO BEGIN'S VISIT AND THEREFORE CONSTITUTED A WARNING TO HIM THAT HIS GOVERNMENT'S STANCE WAS UNACCEPTABLE. YEDIOT AHARONOT COMMENTED THAT THE TIMING OF THE STATEMENT MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED TO "CALM THE ARABS SINCE WASHINGTON'S SILENCE (ON BEGIN'S STATEMENTS) MIGHT BE INTERPRETED" AS ACQUIESCENCE IN
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HIS VIEWS.

5. THE ARAB REACTION, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS LARGELY POSITIVE. MOST ARAB DAILIES INTERPRETED THE STATEMENT AS A REBUKE TO BEGIN AND SAID THAT IT SHOWED THE FIRM US COMMITMENT TO PUSH THE PEACE PROCESS FORWARD. THE JORDANIANS NEWSPAPER AD-DUSTOUR STATED THAT THE US, BY AFFIRMING THE NEED FOR ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL IN THE WEST BANK, HAD "RUNG THE BELL IN ISRAEL'S EAR," AND JORDAN RADIO QUOTED AN UNIDENTIFIED OFFICIAL AS WELCOMING THE US STATEMENT. CAIRO RADIO INTERPRETED THE REMARKS AS REAFFIRMING THE US DESIRE TO RECONVENE THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, WHILE NOTING THAT THE STATEMENT HAD BEEN VAGUE ABOUT CONCESSIONS THE ARABS WOULD BE ASKED TO MAKE.

6. THE PLO HAS IGNORED THE STATEMENT SO FAR, BUT TOOK ANOTHER TACK IN ACCUSING THE US OF FOLLOWING A MIDDLE EAST POLICY AIMED AT GAINING TIME FOR ISRAEL. A STATEMENT BY THE PLO NOTED REPORTS THAT THE US HAD JUST AGREED TO SELL ISRAEL \$115 MILLION WORTH OF ARMS. ACCORDING TO THE STATEMENT, THIS WAS "A PRACTICAL AFFIRMATION OF US BLESSING ISRAEL'S AGGRESSIVE AND EXPANSIONIST

POLICY." (CONFIDENTIAL)

7. LEBANON. CLASHES IN BEIRUT BETWEEN RIVAL PALESTINIAN GROUPS ON THE NIGHT OF JUNE 27-28 WERE THE HEAVIEST IN THE CITY IN SEVERAL MONTHS. TOTAL CASUALTIES WERE AT LEAST 50. THE CLASHES FOLLOWED A BOMBING OF A SAIQA HEADQUARTERS BY REJECTIONIST ELEMENTS. SAIQA, DESPITE FATAH PLEAS TO WAIT, SHELLED REJECTIONIST STRONGHOLDS. THIS IS ANOTHER EPISODE IN SAIQA'S EFFORTS TO GAIN CONTROL OF REJECTIONIST AREAS.

8. THE RECENT EGYPTIAN PRESS INTERVIEW QUOTING SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSAD AS STATING THAT THE US INSTIGATED THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR IN ORDER TO DIVIDE THE ARABS WAS CALLED
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INACCURATE BY AN EMBASSY BEIRUT SOURCE. DESPITE DENIALS, THE INTERVIEW HAS CAUSED MUCH DISCUSSION IN ARAB CIRCLES. LEBANESE POLITICIAN EDDE, FOR INSTANCE, USED THE INTERVIEW TO CRITICIZE ASSAD AND THE US.

9. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY ROME, THE VATICAN IS PRE-OCCUPIED WITH THE STALEMATE IN LEBANON AND RECENTLY HAS MADE APPROACHES TO SAUDI ARABIA, SYRIA AND FRANCE TO STIMULATE SUPPORT FOR THE RESUMPTION OF A POLITICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS AND TO STEP UP RECONSTRUCTION. A DELAY ON THESE FRONTS WOULD HAVE TWO UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES IN THE VATICAN'S VIEW. FIRST, IT GIVES TIME TO THE PALESTINIANS TO REGROUP AFTER THEIR DEFEAT. SECONDLY, A DELAY IN RECONSTRUCTION NOT ONLY WILL DELAY THE RETURN OF SOME LEBANESE WHO FLED DURING THE WAR, BUT MAY ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO LEAVE. (CONFIDENTIAL)

10. EGYPT. THE OAU MINISTERIAL COUNCIL, ACCORDING TO CAIRO MENA, HAS APPROVED A DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE PALESTINIANS SUBMITTED BY THE EGYPTIANS. THE RESOLUTION ASSERTS THE RIGHT OF THE PALESTINIANS TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN INDEPENDENT STATE. THE COUNCIL ALSO STRONGLY CONDEMNED ISRAEL'S "EXPANSIONIST POLICY" AND ISRAELI RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA. (UNCLASSIFIED) CHRISTOPHER

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